



Education Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

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From Robert Halfon MP, Chair

The Rt Hon. the Baroness Hallett DBE
Chair of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry
By email

15 March 2022

Draft Terms of Reference for the UK Covid-19 Inquiry

Dear Baroness Hallett,

We are writing with regards to the [draft terms of reference](#) that the Government published on 10 March for the UK Covid-19 Inquiry.

We are concerned to note that under the broad terms of reference for the inquiry to 'Examine the COVID-19 response and the impact of the pandemic in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland', there is only a single reference to education in terms of the 'restrictions on attendance at places of education'. There is no mention of the significant impact of Covid-19 on children and young people at all.

As our Committee has repeatedly heard in evidence sessions over the last two years, the closure of schools and the restrictions placed on educational settings has been nothing short of a national disaster for children and young people, not only in terms of their educational attainment, but also with regards to their mental health and wellbeing, their life chances and their safety. Starting from the beginning of life, even babies and young children have missed out on key development opportunities due to the impact of Covid-19.

As a result of school closures, primary-aged pupils were found to have lost an average of 0.9 months learning in reading and 2.2 months in mathematics by the summer of 2020/21, and secondary-aged pupils had experienced a learning loss of around 1.2 months in reading. Disadvantaged children have been among the worst hit, with some "five, six, seven – in the worse case scenarios – eight months behind" their peers, according to the Education Policy Institute. 1 in 6 children also now have a probable mental health condition, up from 1 in 9 in 2017.

We believe that a significant part of the national inquiry must therefore focus on school closures, and whether this was an effective and proportionate response to the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the impact on mental health and wellbeing and the impact on young people's life chances. The inquiry should consider whether our schools and other

educational establishments should be classified as essential infrastructure, alongside power stations and hospitals, to ensure that they remain open in any future pandemic, and whether or not the Children’s Commissioner should have a say in whether future school closures are necessary.

The Minister of State for School Standards, Robin Walker MP, also told us on 15 March that he agreed “it is right that it [the Covid-19 inquiry] should look into the impact on children across the piece”.

We would urge you, as Chair of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry, to ensure that the final terms of reference contain a much greater focus on the impact that Covid-19 has had on children and their education.

I look forward to hearing from you.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert Halfon'.

Robert Halfon MP
Chair of the Education Committee